

Visions of National Socialist Democracy, Part VI: Rosenberg

An excerpt from Alfred Rosenberg's 1946 political testament, describing a form of multiparty National Socialist democracy



On the face of things Alfred Rosenberg might not be considered a typical example of heterodox political thought. Commonly regarded as the theoretician and ‘political philosopher’ of the Hitlerian National Socialist movement, Rosenberg was a deeply ideological man whose worldview and attitudes could be perceived as rigid even by his colleagues and contemporaries within the NSDAP – certainly the Allied authorities at Nuremberg regarded him as a hidebound fanatic, and he was charged as a war criminal. Yet Rosenberg exhibited his own independent streak at times, particularly in his position as Reich Minister for the Occupied Eastern Territories and most especially in his post-War *Memoirs* (published in German as *Letzte Aufzeichnungen*), written over the course of 1945-1946 while imprisoned as a defendant at the Nuremberg Trials. In his *Memoirs* Rosenberg is remarkably candid about the faults and failings of the Third Reich and the NSDAP. While he consistently defends National Socialism as a great and noble ideal, he also argues that its misuse and demoralization led Germany to ruin – whether through the excesses and overwhelming reach of the SS police state; the abuse of the justice system; the all-powerful role of the Party; and even the actions of his Führer Adolf Hitler, who Rosenberg contends was a great man undone by hubris. One of the most interesting of these sections is near the book’s conclusion, where Rosenberg criticizes the Reich’s over-authoritarian political system; argues that Hitler’s role as dictatorial Führer was originally intended only as a temporary measure; and sketches out an ideal, democratic, multiparty National Socialist system which he (rather unrealistically) seems to be suggesting would be suitable for Germany once freed from its present state of defeat and Allied occupation. This section of Rosenberg’s *Memoirs* is reproduced below, from the abridged Ostara Publications translation. I have made some minor revisions to the text to add several untranslated sections from the original German edition.

My Political Testament

Only Hitler Could be Supreme Leader: Next in Line Would Have to Have Been Elected

The leadership of Hitler was the necessary result of a great national awakening, the Führer state an organically sound re-creation of the idea of the Reich.

Leadership is as different from rulership as it is from chaos. Tyrant and masses belong together just as much as do leader and follower. The two are possible only if they are paired, and are held together in a common bond of duty.

The ever greater power given Hitler was a temporary exception, permissible only after a fourteen-year-long test. This was not one of the goals of the National Socialist idea of state.

The first leader had to come into power as Hitler did. All others were to be elected to serve only for a limited period of time.

Thus it was provided, though no *Wahlgremium* [electoral college] was founded. Before the *Ordensrat* [Order Council] of sixty-one men from all walks of life, anyone could, and would have to, speak confidently and freely.

Before it every minister would have to defend his measures. It was the National Socialist plan to find a strong personality for every given task, and to give that individual all the authority he needed.

Adolf Hitler later broke this rule which he himself had made when, to all practical intents and purposes, he put the chief of police over the minister for the interior, when he allowed special appointees in ever increasing numbers to break into fields of activity that had been circumscribed by elections, and when he permitted several distinct functions to be concentrated in a single new office. Naturally, these may have been emergency measures, justified in times of revolution and war; but they should never be tolerated as permanent practices.

Thus the Minister for Culture of the liberal epoch was, in his day, more integral than the Reich Minister for Education of the National Socialist state. Because art, science and education belong together, it is not necessary to turn science over to a musicologist. In a great people there always will be a certain number of men, artistic in the best sense of the word, who really comprehend this unity. A Propaganda Ministry is completely superfluous. An Information Department in the office of the Reich Chancellor is sufficient. The Chief of Police must never have the rank of a minister, but must be subordinated to the Ministry for the Interior, nor may he hold any other political post.

Whether the Head of State should also be Reich Chancellor, as in the United States of America, is something that can be decided later. In view of the proven tendency of the German to see everything basically, it seems safer to keep these two positions separate (in connection with which the matter of authority over the armed forces must be carefully weighed). The Reich Chancellor, however, must never have the decisive voice in the government, but must confine himself, as long as he is in office, merely to directing policy.

The election of a body of so-called people's representatives appears to remain a necessity. Proportional elections, however, have led to chaos before. What is most evident is the need for finding a method of election which makes governing possible.

Nobody can govern a people if three parties form a coalition, and a fourth with only a few members holds the balance of power.

The so-called justice of not wasting a single vote is, in reality, evidence of the greatest neglect of duty toward the entire nation. Therefore, and without attempting to ape the English elections with their small election districts and personal campaigns in each, the method of election must ensure that a majority wins, the others lose out.

The Reich Senate, chosen partially by election, partially by the appointment of selected men, must have as its function the confidential correction on the part of the government of open parliamentary discussions.

A one-party system was justifiable and historically even a necessity in 1933. But it was an historical mistake to attempt to perpetuate it for all eternity. This would have been impossible anyway, since, after Hitler's death, at least three distinct groups within the National Socialist German Workers' Party would have entered the political arena.

National Socialism at one time was, so to speak, a substitute nation, when the country was threatened with dissolution by thirty-two individual parties. The old parties of the class and religious wars were outmoded and had outlived their usefulness. They had in many respects become no more than hollow shells, and had to be remoulded.

This was as inevitable as the resignation of the twenty-three German dynasties in 1918. Thus it was the historic task of National Socialism to become the spiritual-political basis of life (Nationalism and Socialism) for the entire people.

With this national union no longer disputed, certain wing-groups would have been tolerated. But while this seemed desirable to a large number of people, it was never approved by Hitler who (together with Ley, Goebbels, and the rest) rode a good principle to death.

This new idea will somehow have to be the spiritual basis for the future. What experience taught us must never again be forgotten.

But since we will have to count on more than one political group, the National Socialist identification of party with state is automatically eliminated. In fact, between 1933 and 1945 this identity, never fully comprehended in its effect, jeopardized the most basic laws governing the very life of a people.

Not one of us can claim that we did not uphold the dictum: *the party rules the state*. For a while this was justified, for then it was not the state that created us, but we who had created the state.

True enough, but weren't we already living in a thousand year state – a state the party was to serve? This diffuse dualism could not be overcome by a personal union while the party office on the ministerial level worked towards the termination of this very union.

This would have simply meant the perpetuation of a dictatorship of the antechamber. In connection with the future multi-party system, the position of the representatives of the individual states which make up the Reich will have to be independent.

The creation of the office of *Reichsstatthalter* [Reich Governor] was basically sound. The sovereignty of the Reich was upheld while at the same time the various *Länder* [states] were permitted to govern

themselves. That this require state governments (and perhaps even Chambers of Councillors) though not necessarily *Landtage* [state parliaments], is obvious, if for no other reason than the preservation of national strength. (The representatives elected to the *Reichstag* from a given *Land* could, incidentally, also make up the majority of these Chambers of Councillors).

National Socialism turned into legal centralism, but also particularism in practice. Never was the unity of a central administration more of an obvious necessity than today, when the Reich is divided into four zones. This, then, could be the basis: the appointment by the Head of State of *Reichsstatthalter* (who also serve as Presidents of the State Governments), candidates to be suggested by the Reich Chancellor. The special interests of the individual states to be safeguarded by Chambers of Councillors, by representatives elected to the *Reichstag*, and by representatives in the Senate.

The shocking degeneration of police power in the Third Reich makes it mandatory that independent judges and due process of law once again guarantee the security of the individual.

Time-tested European methods must safeguard the community. Not even the most shrewdly conceived constitution can possibly guarantee permanent security. If a democracy tends toward chaos, the Führer-principle on the other hand might lead to monocracy. Besides that, foreign political developments might lead to social conflicts, and human passions, despite all efforts to subdue them, might break through.

Fate will not be confined by paragraphs. Nevertheless it is important to build upon a foundation valid for all, though this is possible only when the character of a people is fully understood: its historical reaction to the world at large, its living space with its own inherent laws, and, as today, some immediate experience that necessitates, as never before, the examination of one and all existing problems.

National Socialism was both an ideal and an organization, but it had not yet taken on final form. This realization intrigued me long before the war, and I began work on a comprehensive book, tentatively entitled *Die Macht der Form* [*The Power of Form*].

The *leitmotiv* was that in any given historical situation revolutions are made victorious by ideas. Organizations are variable forms of utilitarianism. They can perpetuate a revolution only when they become forms, that is, natural habits, common psychological attitudes, characteristic general reactions to the surrounding world, and eventually spiritual disciplines. This alone can guarantee an organic continuity if the creator of the idea is dead and fate has not provided an acceptable successor.

Only a general form of life – one might also call it type of life, though never scheme of life – can then serve the purpose. This holds good in every field of human endeavor. I had a draft of about four hundred pages ready – they disappeared during the war – which was a little sharp in the mode of expression and was to be rewritten completely and amplified at an older, riper age. These writings on state, science, church, and art were lost (one copy in an air-raid shelter in Berlin, the second in a mine in Upper Austria, the third among the papers sequestered in Castle Banz).

Seen even from this angle, a great accomplishment of the German nation – National Socialism – went to pieces before it had a chance to become formed.

If I put down a few thoughts on the form of a state, I do this because I have experienced the birth, victory, and collapse of its auxiliary structure; for the Party was never more than that, and the structure of the Reich itself had been taken apart without ever being put together again.

The following outline is purely theoretical in nature, since the present is too dark to analyze it fully. Ideas on foreign policy cannot be discussed at all, as is obvious in the face of existing realities. Besides, this outline cannot possibly be couched in legal terminology. It is no more than an expression of my personal attitude, aims, and principles:

1. The Head of State (Reich President, Führer, Reich Protector, Reichsführer) is elected by the people as a whole. The majority of the ballots cast is decisive. In a run-off election only, the two candidates with the greatest number of votes can participate. The term is for five years. The Head of State is the Supreme Commander of the armed forces. A personal union with the office of Reich Chancellor is not possible. The Head of State can be re-elected any number of times.

Reasons: The position as Head of State presupposes a well-known personality, and therefore an election by the entire people seems justified, since under this system, character, feeling, and trust come directly into their own, something that must be taken into consideration in Germany if a real representative of the entire nation is to be elected. The German does not want a mere representative nonentity.

After the present collapse of confidence, a personal union between the offices of Head of State and Reich Chancellor is no longer possible. For the same reason the armed forces must be under the command of the Head of State. His title can be left for the future to decide. A dynasty need not even be discussed, since personal reverence is unthinkable, considering the biological deterioration of a given family, quite apart from other dangers. If it were possible to conduct elections under the decimal system, the political rhythm would conform to the rhythm of the rest of life, something that must not be underestimated as a creative force.

2. Leadership, government, and representation of the people are in the hands of the Reich Chancellor, the *Reichssenat* [Reich Senate], and the *Reichstag*.

The Reich Chancellor is selected by the Head of State, the Reich Ministers are appointed upon the proposal of the Reich Chancellor by the Head of State. The Reich Chancellor issues political directives, but does not have the decisive vote in the cabinet.

It is the duty of the *Reichssenat* to pass on the reports of the Reich Minister concerning important proposed measures. It has the right to submit propositions of its own to the Reich Chancellor. The *Reichssenat* consists of thirty elected and thirty-one appointed members. The minimum age of a Reich Senator is forty years. Thirty senators are elected by *Nährstand* [Agricultural Estate], *Städtetag* [Cities Association], German labor unions, rectors of universities and churches. They require the approval of the Head of State. Thirty-one senators are appointed by him. The sessions of the Senate are secret, and no member is permitted to keep a record or to make notes on them. The Reich Senators hold office for five years, but the Head of State may reappoint them at the end of their terms. The Reich Senate cannot be dissolved.

The *Reichstag* is elected by the people for five years. The territory of the Reich is divided into five hundred election districts in which each party can nominate its own candidates. The candidate getting the majority of votes is elected.

The Reich Chancellor and the Reich Ministers submit their planned political measures to the *Reichstag*. The latter is also permitted to initiate laws. If a bill submitted by the Reich government is turned down in three readings, the Reich Chancellor must submit his resignation to the Head of State. The Head of State

may appoint a new Reich Chancellor, dissolve the *Reichstag* and announce new elections, or he can keep the Reich Chancellor in office until the end of the *Reichstag* term.

The Reich government must resign if the *Reichssenat* and the *Reichstag* demand it by a two thirds majority. In this case the Head of State must appoint a new Reich Chancellor, or else announce new elections for the *Reichstag*. The Head of State declares war only after consulting with the Reich Chancellor, the president of the *Reichssenat*, and the president of the *Reichstag*.

Reasons: Continental democracy with its proportional election system necessarily leads to party anarchy. Under the system outlined above it seems possible to achieve continuity, a really responsible government, the avoidance of majority demagogy, the attracting of men of really important achievements from all walks of life to responsible co-operation, the prevention of a splintering of the party.

This method of selecting the Reich Chancellor, of partly appointing the *Reichssenat*, and electing the *Reichstag*, guarantees the leadership both necessary rights and necessary controls.

3. The members of the *Reichssenat* and the *Reichstag* have the right and the duty of freely exchanging opinions. They must not be called to account for their political opinions or maligned in any way. In connection with any other delict provided for in law, they are held responsible just as is any other citizen. Their immunity is purely political.

Reasons: The immunity of politicians in the democratic Germany frequently had grotesque consequences, inasmuch as the members of the *Reichstag* were active in their professions, but could not be called to account for their slander. This was as much a breach of law as were the irresponsible police arrests of the Third Reich.

4. To govern the individual German *Länder*, the Head of State upon proposal of the Reich Chancellor appoints *Reichsstatthalter* who are at the same time presidents of the provincial governments. The *Reichsstatthalter* is responsible for appointing his own cabinet. The members of the *Reichssenat* and the *Reichstag* from his province are at his service in an advisory capacity. The *Reichsstatthalter* is bound by the directives of the Reich government. His term is for ten years.

Reasons: This assures the unity of the Reich in the field of politics and the principles of general conduct, but leaves the *Reichsstatthalter* every freedom for the cultural development of his home province. He is constantly kept informed by the senators and representatives, without being burdened with an assembly that in each province represents a tremendous squandering of energy. The title of *Staatsminister* would have to be replaced by that of State Director.

5. Inhabitants are classified as citizens of the state or members of the state. Counted among the latter are all recent immigrants. The Reich Minister decides when citizenship may be granted. Only citizens have the right to active and passive election, and are eligible for appointment to state positions. In every other respect all state citizens and state members are equal before the law.

Personal freedom is guaranteed. Arrests can be made only by court order. In emergency cases the policy may deviate from this rule, but must take the case to court within three days. In principle, a judge cannot be unseated. He is independent in his judgements, and subject only to the dictates of the law and his conscience.

The Chief of Police is under the jurisdiction of the Minister for the Interior, and may not hold any post other than his office. The highest court is the *Reichsgericht* [Supreme Court]. In case of the death, absence or any incapacity of the Head of State, the President of the *Reichsgericht* takes over his responsibilities.

Reasons: The possibility of a differentiation between political rights must be newly incorporated into the constitution on the basis of what the experiences have been in various countries. It is an incentive for good behavior, makes the securing of citizenship a matter of achievement, and eliminates from the election of political leaders external, possibly financial factors. On the other hand a uniform human evaluation precludes the possibility of any feeling of inferiority, and also guarantees the legal equality of all.

The election of a substitute for the Head of State seems undesirable. In case of his demise, the taking over of his duties by the president of the *Reichssenat* might be considered. The election of the president of the *Reichsgericht*, on the other hand, would permit law itself to assume its old honored position in German life.

6. The means of disseminating information are basically the property of the state, or are at least at its immediate disposal, particularly the radio and the press. The official News and Information Bureau is under the jurisdiction of the Chief of the Reich Office. He allots the supplies to all government and private publishing enterprises. The *Reichsstatthalter* issue permits for the publication of newspapers, and engage the editors. The latter are contributors to the common weal. Articles must be published under the full names of the authors, or must be identifiable by initials. Books and magazines can be freely published.

Reasons: The misleading of public opinion by private lust for sensationalism is a political cancer in all democracies and a crime against the self-respect of all people. No reference to freedom of the press can justify what has been done by irresponsible journalists in world politics. On the other hand, the attempt to invest the profession of editor with a greater dignity eventually had quite the opposite effect, when the Propaganda Ministry kept them under constant surveillance, and prohibited the expression of any private cultural convictions. It is suggested that all parties, according to their numerical strength, have licensed newspapers, with the *Reichsstatthalter* appointing editors from their respective ranks. Both the free expression of opinions and the interests of Reich and people would thus be safeguarded. (Simultaneously, less paper would be wasted. German forests must not be further depleted, nor imports burdened, for the sake of sheer sensationalism.)

Every editor is obliged to treat the subjects under discussion with all seriousness, and the will to improve is to be his guiding light. Other provisos can be left safely to life itself to determine. In the cultural and scientific magazine field, private initiative as free reign. The Chief of the Reich Chancellery seems the best possible impartial agent to direct and supervise the domestic and foreign news service. The question as to whether or not the radio should be put entirely under his control must be carefully considered, since radio covers many fields. The same holds good for the film industry, especially in connection with its weekly newsreels.

7. Our youth is the future generation of the people as a whole. It has the right to organize freely in *Bünde* [leagues]. These *Bünde*, however, must not be the youth organizations of political parties and social or confessional groups. The central *Bund* leadership, constituted by representatives of the

individual *Bünde*, is under the supervision of the President of the Senate. He approves statutes and by-laws, and allocates funds for youth shelters, hikes, and so on.

Reasons: Youth groups of the old parties were frequently the original *foci* of dissension among the people. The same is true of confessional youth organizations within which the groundwork for the particularism of the Catholic Center or the Evangelical *Bund* was prepared. In the Hitler Youth organization, exclusiveness, after the initially healthy spirit, led to a discipline unbearable to both youth and parents, and in the administration, to a conceit that had a most insalubrious effect on character. However, the Hitler Youth as the successor of an outmoded youth movement must not be simply forgotten. What must be carried over into the future are self-discipline, the desire for unity, the recognition by the leaders of their responsibility for the physical and mental health of the young generation.

Supervision by the president of the Reich Senate seems desirable, inasmuch as he is not involved in everyday politics, though he is directly concerned with the guidance of growing life. The Head of State himself must not be burdened with organizational problems.

8. All Germans have the right to organize in political parties and to hold meetings. Presupposed is the recognition of the unity of Reich and people, and the absence of class and confessional discussion.

Reasons: This point merits careful consideration. How can we be assured there will never again be a historical necessity for another November 9, 1918 or another May 8, 1945? How can division and unity exist side by side? How can ways and means be honestly fought over if there is no common goal to provide a basis for discussions? Only after these questions are answered can social life be organized. It is unthinkable that any party should take orders from outside the Reich, no matter what these orders may look like.

Furthermore, it would have to be ensured by special law that the parties do not set up party troops, except for the *Ordnungsdienst* at meetings. Occasional orderly parades may very well be held without such detachments. The breaking up of any meeting must be severely punished by the banning of any provincial organization, or even entire party, whose leaders have been found guilty.

9. Economic and social organizations are united in the *Nährstand* and in the German Unions (*Arbeitsfront?*). Professional and cultural groups have the right to organize as they see fit. Freedom of conscience and religious freedom are among the basic rights of the Germans.

Reasons: The healthy union idea became the victim of party feuds. Class war and confessional war tried to turn unions into a reservoir of voters for their own purposes. The German Labor Front was based on the sound idea of preventing this splitting into fragments and encouraging cooperation between employees and employers instead of antagonism. A special law should guarantee the possibility of such cooperation, and a trustee of the Reich should be appointed to act as a neutral arbitrator. A commercial firm is just as much of a unit as a farm. Similar steps should be taken in connection with skilled labor or artisans. Details must be worked out most carefully, and particular attention given to the fact that the farmer, his health and security, are the very foundation of the nation. It should be decided whether the professions (attorneys, physicians, and so on) ought to be united in professional chambers. The Kaiser Wilhelm Academy, the German Academy, and other historic institutes, should be maintained. Universal freedom of conscience must be guaranteed. The problem of film censorship must be solved.

This basic outline for a constitution appropriate to the German character and historic situation naturally demands that a great deal of thought and study be devoted to a great many problems. For example, the powers to be granted the Head of State in case of a national emergency corresponding to Paragraph 48 of the Weimar Constitution; the desirability that former Heads of State and Reich Chancellors be appointed Reich Senators; the rules of procedure of the Reich Senate and the Reichstag; the organization structure of the *Nährstand*, the German trade unions, the various professional chambers; the determination that no records are kept of the meetings of the Reich government; review of the criminal code, of the Editor Law [*Schriftleitergesetzes*]. These are all things of progressive life which are no longer fundamentally crucial. There will be different opinions about forms of pensions and insurance, about the relationship of the state to the churches, which are the responsibility of political parties and cannot yet be defined in a basic constitution. For the appointment of *Reichsstatthalter* a customary law will assuredly emerge, according to which they are chosen from among the men of the respective German *Länder*. Estates [*Stände*] and groups will name a certain larger number for selection, who are to be proposed by the Reich Senators to the Head of State.

Today all this is mere *theorizing*; but all the constitutions prepared during the occupation are not testimonies of a free will, but merely involuntary adaptations to that of the occupying powers. Considering the position of the German nation, this is not an accusation but merely a statement of fact. Any constitution presupposes national sovereignty and an extraterritorial area in which a provisional government, headed by the legal Head of State – Grand Admiral Dönitz – can begin the work of reconstructing the German Reich. This idea of a *völkisch* and governmental unity cannot, must not, and will not be given up by a nation that has fought two world wars, nor by the young men of 1939-1945...

